

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11  
AID-05 EB-08 TRSE-00 STR-07 OMB-01 CEA-01 COME-00  
AGRE-00 /088 W

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P 181509Z JUL 78  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4461  
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN  
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST  
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST  
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD  
AMCONSUL MUNICH  
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE  
AMEMBASSY SOFIA  
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 16778

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, EAGR, UR  
SUBJECT: THOUGHTS ON THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP AFTER KULAKOV

SUMMARY: KULAKOV'S SUDDEN DEATH WILL MOST LIKELY BE  
SIGNIFICANT PRIMARILY FOR ITS EFFECT ON THE GENERAL  
LEADERSHIP EQUATION. THE BREZHNEV LEADERSHIP GROUP  
IS NOW UNEXPECTEDLY FACED WITH THE OPTION OF CON-  
TINUING THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO OR MOVING UP A  
CONTENDER FOR A TOP POSITION IN THE POST-BREZHNEV  
PERIOD. RECENT PRECEDENTS SUGGEST THAT THE FORMER  
COURSE IS THE MORE LIKELY. THE LATTER COURSE COULD  
BRING NEW AND POTENTIALLY DESTABILIZING FACTORS INTO  
THE POLITICAL EQUATION. WE WILL THEREFORE BE WATCHING  
WITH GREAT INTEREST WHATEVER MOVES THE LEADERSHIP  
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GROUP MAKES TO REPLACE KULAKOV AS PARTY OVERSEER  
OF AGRICULTURE. END SUMMARY.

1. WE DO NOT EXPECT KULAKOV'S UNTIMELY PASSING TO HAVE  
AN APPRECIABLE SHORT-TERM EFFECT UPON THE FORMULATION  
OR EXECUTION OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY, WHICH CLEARLY WAS  
HIS PRIME AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY. BREZHNEV HAS JUST

THIS MONTH SET FORTH THE PARTY'S STRATEGY AND TACTICS FOR BOOSTING AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT. WHOEVER SUCCEEDS KULAKOV CAN BE EXPECTED TO IMPLEMENT RATHER THAN TO INNOVATE. KULAKOV ALMOST CERTAINLY DID NOT PLAY A MAJOR ROLE EITHER IN THE FORMULATION OR THE EXECUTION OF FOREIGN POLICY. HIS DEATH SHOULD NOT HAVE AN APPRECIABLE SHORT-TERM IMPACT UPON SOVIET FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

2. IT SEEMS TO US THAT KULAKOV'S DEATH WILL BE POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT PRIMARILY FOR ITS EFFECT UPON THE GENERAL SOVIET LEADERSHIP EQUATION. SINCE THE 25TH CPSU CONGRESS IN 1976, THE FEW LEADERSHIP CHANGES AT THE TOP HAVE TENDED TO STRENGTHEN BREZHNEV'S POSITION, WITHOUT CLEARLY INDICATING THE SHAPE OF A POST-BREZHNEV POLITICAL SUCCESSION. FOR EXAMPLE:  
--WHEN MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND FULL POLITBURO MEMBER GRECHKO DIED IN MID-1976, HE WAS REPLACED BY LONG-TIME CENTRAL COMMITTEE FUNCTIONARY FOR MILITARY AFFAIRS AND NEWLY-APPOINTED FULL POLITBURO MEMBER USTINOV; SVERDLOVSK OBKOM FIRST SECRETARY AND APPARENT KIRILENKO PROTEGE RYABOV SUBSEQUENTLY WAS BROUGHT INTO THE CC SECRETARIAT TO FILL USTINOV'S POSITION IN THAT BODY;  
--WHEN CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET PRESIDUM PODGORNYY WAS SUDDENLY OUSTED LAST YEAR, LONG-TIME

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS FUNCTIONARY KUZNETSOV CAME INTO THE POLITBURO AS A CANDIDATE MEMBER TO HANDLE THE ROUTINE ASPECTS OF PODGORNYY'S POSITION AS CHIEF OF STATE, WHILE BREZHNEV HIMSELF TOOK THE TITLE AS WELL AS THE MORE PRESTIGIOUS FUNCTIONS OF THE POSITION.

3. WILL LEADERSHIP ADJUSTMENTS IN THE AFTERMATH OF KULAKOV'S DEATH CONFORM TO THIS RELATIVELY UNEXCITING MAINTENANCE OF THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO DOMINATED BY BREZHNEV AND HIS CLOSE SUPPORTERS, OR WILL THEY USHER IN A PERIOD OF MORE ACTIVE AND MORE UNPREDICTABLE POLITICAL MANEUVERING? THIS QUESTION IS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT IN CONSIDERING HOW KULAKOV MAY BE REPLACED, SINCE HE WAS THE ONLY LEADER BELOW 65 TO SIT BOTH IN THE POLITBURO AND THE SECRETARIAT, AND HENCE WAS IN AND WE SEE NO PERSUASIVE EVIDENCE INDICATING OTHERWISE--RECENT PRECEDENT FAVORS FURTHER ADJUSTMENTS CALCULATED TO PRESERVE THE STATUS QUO.

4. IF THE "STATUS QUO OPTION" IS PURSUED, PROBABLY THE LEAST CONTROVERSIAL MOVE WOULD BE THE EVENTUAL

ELEVATION TO THE CC SECRETARIAT OF THE PRESENT  
CHIEF OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S AGRICULTURAL DEPART-  
MENT, VLADIMIR A. KARLOV. KARLOV WOULD APPEAR TO  
HAVE BEEN A LOYAL KULAKOV DEPUTY AND, BY IMPLICATION,  
A LOYAL ALTHOUGH RELATIVELY JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE  
BREZHNEV TEAM. KARLOV BECAME KULAKOV'S FIRST DEPUTY  
IN THE CC AGRICULTURAL DEPARTMENT IN 1966, SHORTLY  
AFTER KULAKOV BECAME CHIEF OF THE DEPARTMENT. KARLOV  
WAS MADE A FULL CC MEMBER IN LATE 1976. KARLOV'S  
DEPARTMENT WAS PUBLICLY CRITICIZED BY BREZHNEV AT  
THE RECENT CC PLENUM ON AGRICULTURE, HOWEVER, AND  
IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT BOTH KULAKOV AND KARLOV  
WERE BLAMED FOR THE CURRENT AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS  
THAT BROUGHT ABOUT THAT PLENUM.  
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5. WE ASSUME THAT KULAKOV'S SUCCESSOR AS PARTY OVERSEER FOR AGRICULTURE WILL HAVE A SOLID AGRICULTURAL BACKGROUND. IF KARLOV IS NOT MOVED UP, THE LEADERSHIP MIGHT OPT TO PASS KULAKOV'S PORTFOLIO TO A FULL OR CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER NOT AMBITIOUS FOR BIGGER THINGS AND THUS NOT LIKELY TO UPSET THE PRESENT EQUILIBRIUM AT THE TOP. THE PROBLEM HERE WOULD SEEM TO BE THAT NO MOSCOW-BASED FULL POLITBURO MEMBER HAS SOLID AGRICULTURAL CREDENTIALS, AND TO MOVE SOMEONE TO MOSCOW, OR TO PROMOTE A CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER, COULD BE POLITICALLY DESTABILIZING.

6. A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE POSSIBLE CANDIDATES FOR KULAKOV'S RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG THE PRESENT SENIOR LEADERSHIP GROUP INDICATES PROBLEMS WITH EACH MAN:  
--KAZAKHSTAN PARTY BOSS KUNAYEV HAS HAD EXTENSIVE  
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AGRICULTURAL EXPERIENCE, ALTHOUGH HE WAS TRAINED IN METALLURGY, AND IS A CLEAR BREZHNEV PROTEGE; HIS KAZAKH NATIONALITY WOULD SEEM TO RULE HIM OUT AS A POLITICAL THREAT TO POTENTIAL CONTENDERS FOR TOP POSITIONS; BUT HE WOULD PROBABLY BE HARD TO REPLACE AS BREZHNEV'S MAN IN KAZAKHSTAN;

--UKRAINIAN PARTY BOSS SHCHERBITSKIY HAS IMPRESSIVE QUALIFICATIONS BOTH IN AGRICULTURE AND AS A BREZHNEV PROTEGE; THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS OF SHCHERBITSKIY'S MOVING TO MOSCOW, AND KULAKOV'S DEATH MAY PROVIDE THE NEEDED OPENING; BUT THE POSITION OF UKRAINIAN CP FIRST SECRETARY IS A VITAL ONE IN ITS OWN RIGHT, AND SHCHERBITSKIY'S MOVE TO THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP IN MOSCOW COULD EASILY BE INTERPRETED AS A SUCCESSION-RELATED MOVE, PARTICULARLY IF HE IS GIVEN A SECRETARIAT SEAT IN ADDITION TO HIS PRESENT POLITBURO MEMBERSHIP;

--BELORUSSIAN CP BOSS MASHEROV, A CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER, HAS BEEN LAUDED FOR HIS REPUBLIC'S AGRICULTURAL SUCCESSES, ALTHOUGH HIS STATUS AS A BREZHNEV LOYALIST IS CLOUDY;

--RSFSR CHIEF EXECUTIVE SOLOMENTSEV, ALSO A CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER, HAS HAD EXTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL EXPERIENCE AND SEEMS TO BE A TRUSTWORTHY MEMBER OF THE BREZHNEV TEAM, BUT HIS PROMOTION COULD BE SEEN AS SUCCESSION-RELATED.

7. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY WOULD BE THE ELEVATION INTO A SENIOR LEADERSHIP BODY-- MOST LIKELY THE SECRETARIAT-- OF THE PRESENT MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, VALENTIN K. MESYATS. GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AGRICULTURAL

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SECTOR, HOWEVER, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT A RELATIVELY JUNIOR MAN WHO HAS HAD LITTLE EXPERIENCE IN THE CENTRAL PARTY APPARATUS WOULD BE GIVEN KULAKOV'S PORTFOLIO. IF A JUNIOR MAN IS TO BE PROMOTED, KARLOV WOULD SEEM THE MORE LIKELY CANDIDATE.

8. IN SHORT, WE HAVE NO WAY TO KNOW WHO WILL REPLACE KULAKOV, BUT THE WAY IN WHICH HE IS REPLACED SHOULD PROVIDE A KEY INDICATOR OF LEADERSHIP POLITICS AND THE TOP. IT WILL, FOR INSTANCE, BE INSTRUCTIVE TO SEE WHETHER OR NOT HIS SUCCESSOR IS GIVEN A SEAT IN BOTH TOP LEADERSHIP BODIES, THE POLITBURO AND THE SECRETARIAT (THIS DUAL STATUS PRESENTLY BEING ENJOYED ONLY BY BREZHNEV, SUSLOV AND KIRILENKO). WE WILL THEREFORE BE FOLLOWING AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE WHATEVER MOVES THE LEADERSHIP GROUP MAKES TO FILL KULAKOV'S POSITION AS PARTY OVERSEER OF AGRICULTURE. MATLOCK

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